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ABSTRACT

Statistics are basic to the legislative process and must be available in a form quickly and easily perceived to support library legislation. There should be a sound statistical base, fleshed out with practical examples, to impress legislators and lay persons. Communication of statistical data to decision makers requires a sound public information and public relations program. Furthermore, successful legislative strategy requires mutual allies and coalitions with like-minded organizations. Founded in 1876, the American Library Association did not open its Washington office until 1945. Within six months, legislation was placed before the Congress; however, it was 10 years before the first federal program for funding library services was signed into law. Within the next 10 years, three more programs were enacted for school libraries, medical libraries, and college level assistance for library training. Legislation establishing the White House Conference was passed in 1974 to provide an efficient way of developing a national consensus on the further development of libraries and information services. Continued congressional support for these programs can be achieved only by vigorous public relations programs supported by meaningful and detailed statistics. (RAA)

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Statistics in Support of Legislation for Libraries, USA

by

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45th IFLA Congress

August 26 - September 1, 1979

Copenhagen, Denmark

Section on Statistics

Statistics in Support of Legislation for Libraries, USA

Eileen D. Cooke, Director
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In addressing this section of IFLA, I am assuming that I am speaking to either dedicated proponents of the fundamental essentiality of statistics, to more recent converts to that basic tenet, or perhaps, to some 11th hour gatherers in the statistical vineyards, such as myself. The reason I am here for the second consecutive year is because I believe that statistics are basic to the legislative process, and since the theme of the entire conference this year is Library Legislation, it seemed unthinkable that I should not attend. As Director of the American Library Association (ALA) Washington Office, a major portion of my daily activities deals with various aspects of library legislation.

Despite my appreciation of the significance of a sound statistical base for any legislative proposal, I cannot emphasize strongly enough that barebone numbers must be fleshed out with practical examples if one aims to win the votes of our lawmakers. There is nothing like a good, homey "for instance" to make points with, or impress, legislators and lay people, alike. Legislation cannot be created in a vacuum. It involves a time-consuming process of providing facts and figures and ideas to decision makers. A variety of ways must be devised to communicate statistical data so that they can be quickly and easily perceived. A good public information or public relations program is an essential component of any legislative campaign. Successful legislative strategy requires recruiting mutual allies and developing coalitions with the representatives of other organizations with common goals and objectives.

For the benefit of those who may be unaware of the work of the ALA Washington Office, allow me to digress for some background history and added perspective. ALA was founded over one hundred years ago, in 1876, but our Washington Office was not opened until October 1945, although there had been talk of the need for such an office and for federal library legislation for nearly two decades before that.

Within six months of our opening in Washington, D.C. bills were introduced in the Senate and House to provide federal funds to help develop public libraries in rural areas throughout the United States. But it took another ten years before sufficient support was mustered in Congress to win final passage. President Eisenhower signed that law, entitled the Library Services Act, in June 1956. Although $7,500,000 was authorized, only $2,050,000 was appropriated to begin the program. That was the first national program to provide funds for public library service. But within another ten years, three more major library grant programs were signed into law--this time by President Johnson: one for school libraries, one for college level assistance and library training and demonstrations, and one for medical libraries. These four programs alone have provided a total of over $3,000,000,000 to improve and extend library service throughout the United States.

Continuing Congressional support for these programs has been achieved by working closely with libraries of all types through their state and school library associations, by sending out a newsletter to disseminate information on legislative proposals and draft regulations, and by occasionally gathering statistical data through brief surveys. Our communications cover a variety of issues ranging from postal rates to energy conservation and from the Florence and Beirut Agreements to copyright and revenue sharing.

Beginning in 1970, the Nixon Administration's budget proposals started federal library grant programs on a confusing and disruptive up-and-down, roller coaster-like course, with Congress repeatedly overruling and restoring recom-

mended cuts. The wildly fluctuating Executive Branch budget proposals and later impoundments of appropriations were totally unpredictable, and as a result it became increasingly difficult for the states and localities to plan effectively for the further development of library services.

To overcome the negative effects of those erratic and ever-changing budget proposals as well as to build stronger financial support at the state and local levels, ALA with the help of its state chapters and some twenty other organizations worked persistently for passage of legislation calling for a White House Conference on Library and Information Services.

The measure was first introduced January 26, 1973 by the Chairman of the Senate Education Subcommitee, Senator Claiborne Pell. He said, "A White House Conference would provide an efficient way of arriving at a truly national consensus regarding the further development of our libraries and information services, and their coordination through greater cooperation and interconnection, making use of the technological resources we have." A full two years passed before the legislation was signed into law, December 31, 1974. Then it took another two and one-half years to get appropriations to carry out the state-level pre-White House Conferences amd the White House Conference, itself, coming up this November 15-19, in Washington, D.C.

Throughout this same period, the ALA Washington Office continued to work on other pieces of legislation to help all types of libraries increasingly beleagured by eroding tax support, spiraling inflation and more demanding and sophisticated users. Tax-supported libraries--public, school, and academic--have been particularly hard pressed, caught up in the information explosion on one side while suffering a decline both in actual budget dollars and in the purchasing power of the funds they received on the other side. Even when budgets remained stable or increased slightly, previous deep cuts in hours of public service, in purchases of books, periodicals, and other library materials could not be restored.

The purchasing power of the library dollar has shrunk alarmingly because the costs of acquiring, processing and providing access to library materials have risen faster than the overall inflation rate. Over the past five years, the average book price has risen 43 percent to $20.10; the average periodical subscription price, 56 percent to $27.58. During the same period, the overall inflation rate rose 32 percent. These costs are uncontrollable no matter how prudently library management watches its dollars.

We have found that calling attention to the graphic illustration on the next page, when talking to members of Congress and their staffs, has been especially useful in getting across the message of the financial plight of college libraries with a minimum of words. It has served also in opening discussions on the budgetary problems of public libraries as well as college and university libraries. It illustrates the drastic 60 percent cut in federal funds for college library resources over the last ten years in comparison with a 137 percent increase in average book prices and a 219 percent increase in the average periodical price at the same time student enrollment also increased by 51 percent.

For the past two years we have been successful in convincing Congress to restore funds for college library resources, authorized by the Higher Education Act, in spite of the Carter Administration's proposal to eliminate this program. The rationale of the President's budget office is that the federal or national government should use tax dollars to assist only the neediest institutions. However, this year the Senate Appropriations Committee, unlike the House, for a variety of reasons including the current taxpayers revolt, epitomized by California's so-called Proposition 13*, agreed to cut off the college library money.

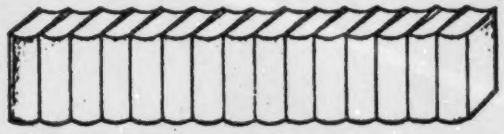
*An amendment to California's tax law which limits property taxes on private homes and on commercial and industrial real estate to 1 percent of market value (4 percent of assessed value).

HEA II-A ACADEMIC LIBRARY PURCHASING POWER CUT

Federal Aid

FY 1968 Appropriation for
HEA Title II-A ($25,000,000)

purchased the
equivalent of



2.9 million books @ $8.47 average cost

OR

2.9 million periodical subscriptions
@ $8.65 average cost

FOR

7.5 million students
1968 enrollment 7,513,091

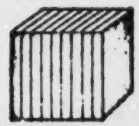
FY 1978 Appropriation for
HEA Title II-A ($9,975,000)

−60%

purchased the
equivalent of

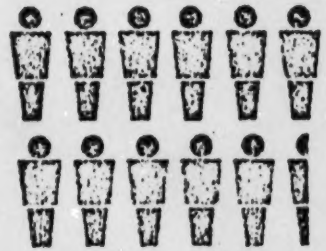
496,269 books @ $20.10 average cost
+137%

OR



361,675 periodical subscriptions
@ $27.58 average cost +219%

FOR



11.4 million students
(1978 enrollment 11,354,756)
+51%

The purchasing power of the Higher Education Act Title II-A College Library Resources program has been cut drastically by a combination of reduced appropriations plus increased costs for library materials and increased enrollment. Since FY 1968, the HEA II-A appropriation has been cut 60 percent, while the average cost of a book has increased by 137 percent and the average cost of a periodical subscription has increased by 219 percent. Student enrollment in higher education has increased 51 percent during the same period.

AMERICAN
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON OFFICE 1979

Subsequently, a House-Senate conference committee, appointed to negotiate the differences between their respective versions of the educations appropriations bill for fiscal year 1980 (October 1, 1979-September 30, 1980), compromised by splitting the House-passed amount of $9,975,000. This means that only $4,987,500 is to be available nationwide. Since some 2,500 higher education institutions apply for these funds, college libraries will get about $2,000 each--not enough to buy 100 hardcover books at the average price of $20.10 or a single subscription to Chemical Abstracts, now around $3,500.

At the same time that the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have been working on money bills, their counterpart education committees have been holding or preparing to hold hearings on amendments to the Higher Education Act, which will probably result in a major revision and extension of the current law. So, the challenge before us is to reconcile the philosophical conflict between the Administration's aim to reduce spending by targeting on only the poorest and the higher education community's belief that currently most institutions are in precarious situations of varying degrees.

The dilemma confronting us is how do we progress through legislative channels which traditionally require a broad base of political support in Congress while attempting to narrow the program focus to the neediest of academic libraries? This could possibly mean a reduction from some 2,500 beneficiaries to about 500 if the Administration has its way. The trend to the more philosophically-based qualitative standards and away from simple quantitative standards compounds the problem. Concise, clearcut formulas and explanations are often the sine qua non of legislation. While factor analysis carries weight and status with statisticians, bottom-line primary numbers and head counting back home usually carry more meaning and monetary value with politicians.